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SOURCE Journal du Commerce et de la Marine.SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE MIDDLE EAST: 1920 - 1952

Comment: The 11 August 1952 issue of the Journal du Commerce et de la Marine published the following notes used by Dr Ibrahim Shreki (or possibly Shurayqi) at various conferences in Europe and in the School of Economics at the University of Rome. Born in Damascus, Dr Shreki is known for his work in geography and geology, and for nearly 2 years served as an expert for the Iranian government. He is director general of the Institute of Research for East Africa, a member of the Academy of Asia, a member of the International Federation of Research Scientists, and a member of the Geographical Society of France.

The Middle Eastern countries, stamped with the Phoenician, Roman, Byzantine, Persian, and Egyptian cultures, have now accomplished a social and economic renaissance through the aid of science. They have come a long and hard road after having been plunged into darkness and chained by enforced feudal laws before World War I. Until 1920-1925, only 2.5 percent could read and write Arabic, Turkish, or Persian; only 3.6 percent of arable land was used; industry was limited and devoid of machines; roads were impassable. The countries had no institutes, hospitals, agriculture or hygiene laboratories, or experienced professionals such as doctors, engineers, and professors.

Today this historic East is no longer the same, no longer fertile ground for parasites, feudalists, and enemies of human principles. It is undergoing a social, cultural, and economic reform based on scientific research.

The following tables and statistics, gathered on the spot over 10 years by me and my colleagues, give a general picture of the present social and economic situation in the Near and Middle East.

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Classification of Land

<u>Country</u>	<u>Population (1,000)</u>	<u>Surface (1,000 sq km)</u>	<u>Arable Land (%)</u>	<u>Used Land (%)</u>
Egypt	20,000	1,100	18-20	30-35
Iran	16,000	1,643	30-35	18-20
Iraq	5,000	450	30-35	15-20
Afghanistan	12,000	730	28-30	15-18
Turkey	20,000	765	40-45	20-25
Syria	3,800	170	45-50	30-35
Lebanon	1,200	10	40-50	40-50
Jordan	500	94	20-25	20-25
Saudi Arabia, Muscat, Oman, Aden, Hadramaut	6,200	1,921	4-5	7-10
Yemen	1,500	60	15-20	8-12
Total	86,200	6,943		

The 6,943-square-kilometer area of these countries, which is 22 times larger than Italy, is divided as follows (in percent):

Desert region	36
Rocky and mountainous region	33
Forest region	5
Arable land for exploitation	25

Arable land, which covers about 1,735,875 square kilometers, is divided into six main classifications as follows: (1) sandy-clayey-chalky, (2) sandy-clayey, (3) clayey-chalky, (4) clayey-sandy, (5) chalky-clayey-sandy, and (6) humus.

The clayey-sandy or sandy-clayey part is the coastal region and the clayey or clayey-chalky part is the central region. In general, these different types of soil contain an average of 1 to 1.5 percent nitrogen; 1.25 percent phosphoric acid; 1.5 percent potassium; and 2.5 percent organic matter.

Sociocultural Development

The following table gives the number of schools, universities, hospitals, and professional men, doctors, engineers, and lawyers, as well as the percentage of literacy.

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<u>Country</u>	<u>Primary and Secondary Schools</u>	<u>Universities</u>	<u>Hospitals With 20-100 Beds</u>	<u>Doctors, Engineers, Lawyers</u>	<u>Literates (%)</u>
Egypt	6,500	4	125	13,000	30-35
Iran	5,000	2	80	8,000	25-30
Iraq	1,200	1	30	2,500	15-20
Turkey	7,000	3	120	10,000	45-50
Afghanistan	1,300	1	30	2,000	15-20
Syria	2,000	1	75	4,000	60-65
Lebanon	2,000	2	50	5,000	85-90
Saudi Arabia	350	-	10	200	8-10
Jordan	150	-	7	150	10-15
Yemen	100	-	5	120	7- 8
Total	25,600	14	532	44,970	

Egypt is among the most economically developed of these countries and is the "brain" of the Arab World and the cradle of ancient civilization.

Iran, which also has ancient traditions, has had a remarkable socioeconomic recovery stemming from Shah Reza Pahlavi the Great, father of the present Shah. There has been a reconstruction of rural life, industrial development, and a cultural propagation of the old empire.

Mineral Resources

Petroleum, phosphate, kaolin, coal, bitumen, sulfur, and turquoise are natural resources now being exploited. Others which remain practically intact are iron, copper, lead, silver, gold, and precious stones.

1. Petroleum

Petroleum deposits exist from the Red Sea to the central regions of Iraq and from Azerbaijan to the Persian Gulf, and are not as yet fully exploited. British and American oil fields cover only a small part of the total oil area. It is estimated that annual production in the Middle East will reach 200 million tons. There are 450,000 people employed in the refineries, at the wells, and in offices.

2. Phosphate

Phosphate, an important fertilizer for agriculture, is found in Jordan, Egypt, Southern Lebanon, and 100 kilometers east of Damascus. Natural phosphate deposits in Egypt and Jordan are rich in phosphoric acid, varying between 40 and 60 percent, of which 6 to 10 percent is soluble. Middle Eastern phosphate comes from animal decomposition, particularly of fish which lived centuries ago over what is now dry land.

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Natural phosphate is used in the East as a fertilizer suitable for all types of cultivation and all kinds of soil, particularly that which is weak in chalk. In Jordan and Lebanon it has given excellent results with banana and orange trees.

In Egypt and Jordan 300,000 to 400,000 tons are exploited annually, while in Syria and in Lebanon the deposits remain intact.

3. Bitumen

Bitumen is abundant in Southern Lebanon (Hasbaya, Ayn-Abal, Milkha) and near Latakia (Kfaray) on the West Syrian side. Lebanese bitumen is used in the chemical industry to make certain products, particularly adhesive products. Its extraction is difficult and costly, and amounts to 600 tons annually. Latakian bitumen is a brown, shining asphalt which is used to pave roads and has become famous throughout the Near East, where most of the roads are paved with it. The annual extraction is 30,000 tons.

4. Coal

Coal, sulfur, and turquoise are mined on a large scale in Iran. The coal centers are Mazanderan and Gilan (North Iran) and the sulfur and turquoise centers are Khorassan (East Iran) and Nishapur, the latter having been the main turquoise center for centuries. These important mines were started at the end of World War I, before which time there was only a very limited extraction.

Agriculture

Agriculture is the main source of economic independence in the Near and Middle East, whose soil varies greatly and is only partly used, the rest being abandoned for lack of modern machinery. Of the 174 million hectares (one hectare equals 2.47 acres), only 43 million are used for orchards, cereals, industrial plants, and vegetables. It is only since 1940 that efforts have been made to cultivate products which are not only suitable to the soil and climate, but which will also give large returns.

Technical and economic progress has been made mostly in wheat, rice, cotton, sugar beets, tea, and orange, olive, and apple trees, and today most of the land used is devoted to these products. Each country specializes in one or more crops: Egypt in cotton, rice, and corn; Syria in wheat, tobacco, and olives; Lebanon in oranges, tobacco, and olives; Iraq in dates; Iran in rice, opium, tobacco, and tea; Turkey in tobacco, fruits, and sugar cane; and Saudi Arabia and Yemen in dates and coffee.

Our statistics show the following approximate production in various crops in the Near and Middle East:

Cotton	4,000,000 bales
Tobacco	70,000 tons
Dates	700,000 tons
Rice	1,500,000 tons
Wheat	5,000,000 tons
Oranges	350,000 tons
Olive oil	30,000 tons

Technical methods and agricultural machines (tractors, reapers, threshers) appeared after 1925 and are spreading, although there is still a lack of machinery, which prevents any great acceleration in production.

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Chemical fertilizers have been known only for about 20 years, but are widely used in Egypt and Lebanon. Other countries such as Syria, Turkey, and Iran use them very slightly, for these countries, as well as Iraq and Afghanistan, use organic fertilizer, particularly sheep and goat manure. Throughout the area, production is aided by the use of insecticides against the aphid, olive fly, apple worm, vine mildew, and locust.

Animal husbandry is also included in the agricultural recovery as the result of breeding centers in Turkey, Egypt, and Iran which have improved the stock and have led to a remarkable increase. The following figures are in thousands:

<u>Country</u>	<u>Horses</u>	<u>Donkeys, Mules</u>	<u>Cows, Steers</u>	<u>Camels</u>	<u>Goats, Sheep</u>
Iran	500	2,200	6,000	500	13,000
Iraq	200	1,000	2,500	2,000	7,000
Turkey	350	2,500	6,000	300	11,000
Afghanistan	300	1,500	3,000	150	6,000
Egypt	200	1,500	5,500	300	8,000
Saudi Arabia	200	400	200	3,000	4,500
Yemen	80	200	250	130	1,000
Syria	150	800	3,500	150	4,000
Lebanon	50	100	500	20	1,000
Jordan	60	70	320	100	1,000
Total	2,090	10,270	27,770	6,650	56,500

Industry

Industrialization has not yet reached the expected level; the only industries are the wool and cotton textiles industries in Iran, Egypt, and Turkey. There are many factories which cannot compete technically with the great industrial countries but nevertheless produce an excellent quality of sugar, leather, fabric, soap, and wax. The Iranian and Egyptian textile industries are expected to rival those in Europe and the US within a few years.

Until some 30 years ago, cotton, wool, and silk spinning was done by archaic methods, but now mechanical instruments are being introduced more and more. Iran now produces 5 million kilograms of cotton thread annually and 30 million meters of cotton, wool, and silk fabric. It is estimated that in about 10 years the Middle East will not only be able to satisfy local demand, but will also be able to export textiles, as a result of the use of the natural resources of arable land, animals, and native intelligence.

In a quarter of a century 80 textile factories, 20 sugar refineries, 70 leather factories, and 85 oil refineries have been built in addition to plants for soap, wax, and glass.

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In Egypt, Turkey, Iran, Syria, and Lebanon an average of 20 percent of the women can read and write, and of these a large number are doctors, lawyers, journalists, writers, and teachers.

The press also has seen a great increase; as the following figures show:

<u>Country</u>	<u>Daily Papers</u>	<u>Weekly Magazines</u>	<u>Monthly Magazines</u>
Egypt	25	15	35
Turkey	20	10	10
Iran	17	8	7
Syria	17	7	6
Lebanon	22	10	6
Iraq	10	4	3
Afghanistan	5	3	2
Jordan	5	2	1
Saudi Arabia	2	1	1
Yemen	2	1	1
Total	125	61	72

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